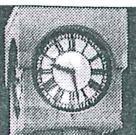


Local
Briefs

Utilities department might move

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For almost 19 months, the former Lake County Minimum Security Facility in Painesville Township has remained vacant.

However, it's possible that might change as the Lake County Utilities Department considers a move of most of the agency's operations from downtown Painesville to the facility.

The old jail operated at 2205 Blase Nemeth Road for more than eight years until it closed Dec. 14, 2009, because of budget cuts.

The facility's 78 beds were used to house minimum security inmates, such as those in work release programs, in a more cost-efficient manner that kept bed space available for more serious offenders in the main jail, 104 E. Erie St. in Painesville, according to Sheriff Daniel A. Dunlap.

About a year ago, commissioners asked the Utilities Department to look into whether moving operations into the now vacant building would be feasible, said Randy Rothlisberger, director of water for the Utilities Department.

"What we looked at was moving our engineering and customer services department," he said. "Basically, what we've done is to look to see if it fits."

Right now, the Utilities Department is located in the second and third floor of the county administration building, 105 Main St. in Painesville.

"We're a little cramped for space and (a move) would



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Randy Rothlisberger of the Lake County Utilities Department stands in the former minimum-security county jail in Painesville Township. The Utilities Department is considering a move to the vacant facility.

give us how much we would need over there," Rothlisberger said.

The former jail has about 15,194 square feet of space available, he said.

Another reason for the move is the building sits on property adjacent to the Utilities Department's training center building and Lake County Solid Waste Facility, Rothlisberger said.

There is no timetable for when a potential move would take place and the decision would be left with commissioners on whether it may happen, he said.

"It looks like we could definitely fit into there," Rothlisberger said. "It would probably be a good fit for us."

A potential drawback for a move is the Utilities Department's need for employees to go to Painesville on a daily basis to conduct business within the county Treasurer's Office, he said. Plus, communication with other county offices would have to be done more remotely rather than in-person.

Dunlap said with commissioners' permission, his department was able to move some materials out of the facility, such as tables and

chairs, to the main jail in Painesville.

"Some of those items here were 20 years old," the sheriff said.

After the jail closed and with the state's permission, double bunking of inmates started with about 50 inmates sharing a cell, Dunlap said. Previously, each inmate had their own cell.

Bunks from the former jail were removed to help with the increased occupancy, the sheriff said.

Overcrowding is not currently an issue, he said. That's because the jail's population

Plans

More about the potential move from Randy Rothlisberger.
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fluctuates. At times there have been around 400 inmates housed and now the number is around 300 inmates.

Space still continues to be leased to other agencies such as the Euclid Police Department and federal government, Dunlap said.